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Putting Shock To Good Use

It was a disheartening and humiliating week-end. The United States Government had managed to play itself artfully into Mr. Khrushchev's reel. And there we all were with the State Department and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, not to say the Central Intelligence Agency, gasping and wondering how it happened.

It happened—let's face this and have it over—because we Americans are obsessed with an essentially unsophisticated, romantic view of ourselves and the world we're in. We're sportsmen. The other fellow isn't. We play clean. He doesn't. We have nothing to hide. He's sinister and devious.

This is nonsense. It's dangerous nonsense. If the spy-plane incident has banished it from our collection of illusions and from our national life and politics—and if nothing worse grows out of it all—then we shall have benefited from our shock and shame. Senator Case (R., N. J.) has put the problem realistically:

It really isn't a question of right. It's a question of what has to be done. The thing that would really concern me would be if I didn't think that we were making every necessary effort to get all the possible information we could for the safety and security of our country.

We do spy on the Russians, as they spy on us. Mr. Khrushchev himself on his visit here last year proposed to Allen W. Dulles of the C. I. A. that the two powers might effect some small economies by hiring the same secret agents and paying them one fee. Mr. K. is excited about his coup, and he might well be, since he mousetrapped us into bringing off a propaganda triumph for him; but he cannot possibly be shocked or angry. He knows the rules. He knows it's not a game.

Spying is necessary because Russia has given us ample reason to fear for our life. Whether that fight was necessary at that time, whether any physical incursion of this sort (with its latent capacity to touch off massive retaliation) is tolerable, whether our diplomacy is skilled or even competent—these are other questions. The point is that we are engaged in a cold war which is war, and we shall have to remain engaged in it until something is done to reduce tensions, establish a substantial basis for trust, and enable a genuine coexistence between peoples and nations that have exiled ill will from their hearts. We—meaning mankind—must find a way of making the world safe, even foolproof. And that gets us back to the subject matter for the summit.